

Bloc Québécois response to the survey from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Investments

i) Should your party form the next Government of Canada, would you increase (or, as the opposition party, would you support) the federal financial commitment toward the protection of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes (excluding infrastructure projects) next year? If so, by how much?

We believe that it is necessary for the federal government to increase funding for the protection of the St. Lawrence.

The Bloc Québécois held a vast consultation process regarding “The future of the St. Lawrence” last fall. During the hearings, coastal residents and interest groups advocating the exceptional heritage of the Seaway voiced the importance of increasing funding for protection measures.

Here are a few of the measures we are setting forth.

MEASURES OVERVIEW: ECOSYSTEMS PROTECTION

I. Funding to fight shoreline erosion

Investment requested: 500 million dollars for creating the fund and 100 millions dollars a year for 25 years.

The Bloc Québécois requests the creation of a 500 million dollar compensation fund to compensate Québec and the provinces for the negative effects of climate change. The fund will serve both to compensate Québec and other provinces for costs already incurred toward reducing the impact of climate change, and also to give these provinces the means to finance measures to limit the acceleration of erosion. The amounts granted to Québec and coastal provinces will be prorated according to their needs (sand nourishment, residential relocation and expansion of non-buildable sectors, breakwaters, rock fill, etc.).

Also, the federal government must commit to enrich the initial fund at the rate of 100 million dollars par year over 25 years, or to make some fiscal space available so that Québec and other provinces can protect their shorelines against erosion.

II. Shoreline Protection Program

Investment requested: 4 million dollars /year

The Program, abolished in 1997, benefited of 15 million dollars in financing over ten years between 1970 and 1980. Consequently, we request an adjusted amount, taking inflation into account, which translates into 4 million dollars per year.

III. ZIP Funding

Investment requested: 2 millions dollars/year

It is unfortunate to see that despite the existence of the Canada-Québec Agreement on the St. Lawrence, the federal government has abandoned the ZIPs. Indeed, these Priority Intervention Zones benefit from a paltry \$75,000 a year funding from the federal government since 1998. However, better financing would allow for a better consultation process with shoreline partners in order to identify priority interventions and to create an Ecological Rehabilitation Action Plan in each of the ZIP committees. A consequential increase of funding for the ZIP committees is required so that these regional committees can act to raise the awareness of shoreline community organizations and residents regarding the challenges faced by the St. Lawrence.

IV. Fisheries management

Investment requested: 227 million dollars/year

The Bloc Québécois is suggesting a series of measures to support to fishing industry, namely:

- An amendment to the *Fisheries Act* so that management be science-based rather than based upon the political interests of the sitting government
- A complete upgrade of the small-boat harbour network at 95 million dollars per year for 3 years
- A Fisheries Assistance Plan at 80 million dollars par year
- A Shrimping Plan at 50 million dollars per year and a plan to mitigate the increase in fuel costs at 1 million dollars per year
- A revision of the cost of fishing licences at 1 million dollars per year

MEASURES OVERVIEW: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

V. Competitive positioning of the St. Lawrence

Investment requested: 230 million dollars/year

While the St. Lawrence waterway is a vital component to the economic development of Québec, its competitive positioning has weakened over the past few years. The federal government's decisions regarding maritime transportation have had a lot to do with this situation. To remediate this situation, the Bloc Québécois asks the federal government to, namely:

- Support the maritime transportation industry by bearing the cost of dredging and ice-breaking and by lowering the port rates; 50 million dollars per year
- Encourage intermodal transportation, namely short sea shipping; 180 million dollars per year

MEASURES OVERVIEW: DISASTER ASSISTANCE

VI. Tax credit to repair damage caused by large-scale floods

Investment requested: 1 million dollars/year

The Bloc Québécois feels that the federal government should also offer disaster assistance, to the victims of the December 2010 tides, in the form of a tax credit to repair damage caused by this disaster. This tax credit would mirror the home improvement tax credit, which was a non-refundable tax credit applied to renovations to a home, condo or cottage, and which ended February 1st, 2010. The measure would be in the form of a 15% credit on the eligible portion of expenses between \$1,000 and \$10,000, for a maximum tax break of \$1,350.

VII. Other disaster assistance measures

Investment requested: To be determined

Other measures will be considered to help the victims who face the immediate consequences of these climatic disruptions. For example, during the 2007 Rivière-au-Renard floods, DEC Canada had instituted a specific aid measure to compensate businesses, companies and NPOs without private insurance or without access to the General Programme of Financial Assistance for disasters.

Summary

Measures suggested for "The future of the St. Lawrence"	2011-2012	2012-2013
Funding to fight shoreline erosion	500	100
Shoreline protection program	4	4
ZIP funding	2	2
Competitive positioning of the St. Lawrence	230	230
Fisheries Management	227	227
Tax credit to repair damage from large-scale floods	1	1
Total	964	564

ii) In its pre-budget proposal, the Cities Initiative suggested the creation of a Great Lakes and St- Lawrence Sustainability Fund for local-scale interventions to protect the sub-littoral areas within the communities of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin. Should your party form the next Government of Canada, would you create (or, as the opposition party, would you support) such a fund?

Yes. However, in the same vein as what was unanimously denounced in Québec when the 2007 Plan of the IJC was suggested, we find it unacceptable to consider the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin from the standpoint of environmental benefits to the Great Lakes only. Impacts, mitigative measures and benefits must be assessed fairly for each of the basin's components.

The Bloc Québécois feels that the creation of such a fund should foster an approach including the entirety of the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes basin to respond fairly to the needs of each component, according to the particular impacts they suffer.

Infrastructures

New federal wastewater treatment standards will come into effect this year. These standards will force communities to rebuild or replace over 25% of the 3,500 wastewater treatment systems in Canada. The investments required for upgrading these infrastructures are estimated at over 13 billion dollars over the next 30 years and at more than 30 billion dollars when taking into account the required upgrades to meet the current standards.

iii) What would be your plan to help municipalities meet the federal standards for wastewater treatment?

The Bloc Québécois has noticed that the municipalities are questioning the new discharge standards suggested by Environment Canada, since the Québec government has full supervision for water purification.

As Québec stated in its national water policy in 2002, environmental interventions from the federal government must take into account Québec's actions and competencies. Disregarding the request from Québec, the federal government turns to the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* to consider new Canada-wide standards and guidelines regarding the discharge of toxic substances in municipal wastewater effluents.

Condemning the fact that the federal government does not use enough budgetary resources to cover its fair share of infrastructural investments required to meet the requirements it wants to suggest, Québec and Newfoundland have refused to endorse the Canada-wide Strategy for the management of municipal wastewater effluents.

In order to optimize the interventions from both levels of government, it is essential to not only avoid the overlapping of competencies and confusion, but also to supply municipalities a means of optimizing or installing infrastructures allowing them to meet the new water purification standards.

Indeed, there are still many small shoreline municipalities that simply do not have the means to treat themselves to a network for sewers, filtration and wastewater treatment. It irresponsible to impose standards without considering both the means the municipalities have to meet such standards, and the state of the existing infrastructure.

According to the document detailing the Canada-wide Strategy for the management of municipal wastewater effluents, the total cost of implementing the Strategy will be at least 10.3 to 13.1 billion dollars over 30 years (inflation notwithstanding). However, as argued by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), this cost assessment takes for granted that the overall infrastructures for water supply, wastewater and rainwater are already completely upgraded to existing standards. However, a joint study by the FCM and McGill University estimates that the municipal infrastructure deficit – the cost to upgrade existing infrastructures to meet current standards – would stand at 31 billion dollars.

To this end, it is evident that the portion of investment from each level of government should be reviewed and corrected to reflect each level's capacity.

On one hand, the Bloc Québécois will pressure the federal government to ensure that infrastructure investments be modified to take into account the capacity of each level: the federal government would shoulder 50% of the expenses, Québec and the provinces would shoulder 35% and municipalities would cover the remaining 15%. This would better reflect the financial capacities of each level of government.

On the other hand, the Bloc Québécois requests that the federal government, instead of creating new programs, consolidate them as a unique, unconditional and recurring transfer fund so that: the federal government respect the competencies of Québec and the provinces; Québec and the provinces get their fair share; the municipal and strategic infrastructure investments be foreseeable, recurring and adapted to local needs.

Leadership

iv) Should your party form the next Government of Canada, would you commit to hold (or, as the opposition party, would you support) a strong political leadership for the protection of Canada's valuable water resources, including the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes? If so, how would you do so?

For ten years, the Bloc Québécois has reflected upon its role regarding the challenges faced by the St. Lawrence. Considering the multiplication and the complexity of environmental, economic and social issues related to this vital artery for the Québec nation, the Bloc Québécois members of Parliament consider the St. Lawrence a priority.

In approaching any file related to the St. Lawrence, each Member of Parliament acts in the best interest of Quebecers. However, it seemed imperative to mobilize the resources of the Bloc Québécois to obtain a true overview of the requirements of the St. Lawrence in this post-Kyoto era.

That is why, in 2005, the members of Parliament from St. Lawrence coastline constituencies launched a vast consultation process to gather the opinion of the population and of various interest groups regarding the sustainable development and the future of the St. Lawrence. Since

then, we have never stopped working in light of this renewed perspective that all stakeholder contributed to through their MPs.

The St. Lawrence Plan for a Sustainable Development 2005-2010, jointly established by Québec and Ottawa, expired on March 31, 2010. While the federal government was announcing the one-year renewal of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem, it remained silent regarding its vision for the St. Lawrence.

Faced with the federal government's inertia, the Bloc Québécois decided to act and to mobilize the St. Lawrence MPs to go out in the field and meet the many stakeholders that experience, daily, the reality of the St. Lawrence.

That is how on September 7, 2010, the Bloc Québécois launched its second tour of the St. Lawrence called *Le Saint-Laurent, ça nous appartient!* Over the following days, the tour team, comprised of the 19 MPs from coastline constituencies as well as two official Bloc Québécois candidates, travelled through 20 constituencies where they consulted with 167 stakeholders concerned with the future of the St. Lawrence.

In doing so, we collectively reminded the federal government that the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes network is not limited to Ontario, but that Quebecers are true custodians of the St. Lawrence and of its future.

An analysis of the interventions gathered during the tour by the team of MPs and candidates that travelled in the coastal regions allowed us to upgrade and bolster the Bloc Québécois' reflection regarding the management of the St. Lawrence.

At the beginning of 2011, the Bloc Québécois published a report which presented a global view of the consultations to express the concerns of coastal residents and advocates of the priceless resource which the St. Lawrence is. It is through its actions that the Bloc Québécois shows its leadership and constantly reflects regarding such challenges. This approach is shared throughout the party.

Spill Prevention

v) Should your party form the next Government of Canada, would you ensure (or, as the opposition party, would you support) the upgrade of Canada's Marine Oil Spill Preparedness and Response Regime by including:

- **Special attention to the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes basin;**
- **A formal intervention framework following a chemical spill;**
- **A prevention and intervention plan taking into account the emerging chemicals transported through the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, including new petroleum products, new chemicals and other new substances.**

Between 2007 and 2009, more than 4,160 pollution-related incidents were reported to the Coast Guard, 2,000 of which involved ships ranging from leisure and fishing crafts to freighters and oil tankers.

The Canadian Coast Guard is tasked with ensuring adequate intervention in case of shipping spills. However, in his annual report presented to the House of Commons in the fall of 2010, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development denounced the fact that no assessment is made to ensure that the Coast Guard is ready to intervene efficiently.

Indeed, no comprehensive assessment of the Coast Guard's capacity to intervene has been conducted since 2000. Consequently, according to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, "the Coast Guard is unable to determine how much oil spill response equipment it should have and whether it has appropriate capacity to address the risks." Furthermore, the Canadian Emergency Management Plans are not up to date and the spill-related information logging system is not reliable.

The Bloc Québécois considers that this situation is completely unacceptable, especially in light of the fact that the transformation of the Montréal-Est refinery into a petroleum-handling facility could possibly increase oil tanker traffic on the St. Lawrence. Consequently, the Bloc Québécois requires that the federal government update its emergency preparedness and intervention system and spare no effort to be ready to intervene efficiently should a spill occur.

On the other hand, toxic discharges in the St. Lawrence are currently assessed case by case. The Bloc Québécois feels that it is necessary to consolidate all related learnings, to broaden the horizons and to act in keeping with the ecosystemic realities of the St. Lawrence and its tributaries. To that end, a pollutant interaction analysis is crucial. We now have the scientific and technical capabilities, as well as the necessary knowledge base, to allow us to look at the big picture.

St. Lawrence Seaway

The St. Lawrence already feels the effect of climate change. Severe storms and tides are causing a faster than common erosion in the estuary and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and also cause a decrease of the seaway water level in the Montréal region.

vi) Should your party form the next Government of Canada, would you create (or, as the opposition party, would you support) an assistance program for coastal communities of the St. Lawrence to help them adapt and respond to the effects of climate change?

It is profoundly unjust that the federal government, which does not invest itself in the fight against GHG emissions, allows the enormous financial burden related to the consequences of climate change to rest upon the shoulders of the provinces and of Québec.

The Bloc Québécois requests the creation of a 500 million dollar compensation fund to compensate for the negative effects of climate change. The fund will serve both to compensate

Québec and other provinces for costs already incurred toward reducing the impact of climate change, and also to give these provinces the means to finance measures to limit the acceleration of erosion. The amounts granted to Québec and coastal provinces will be prorated according to their needs (sand nourishment, residential relocation and expansion of non-buildable sectors, breakwaters, rock fill, etc.).

Also, the federal government must commit to enrich the initial fund at the rate of 100 million dollars par year over 25 years, or make the fiscal space available so that Québec and other provinces can protect their shorelines against erosion.

Other one-time measures must also be considered to help victims of immediate consequences of climatic disruptions. For example, during the 2007 Rivière-au-Renard floods, DEC Canada had instituted a specific aid measure to compensate businesses, companies and NPOs without private insurance or without access to the General Programme of Financial Assistance for disasters.